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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 000339

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KINSHASA PASS TO BRAZZAVILLE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/16/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [ASEC](#) [IV](#)  
SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: EXAMS FINALLY HELD IN THE NORTH

Classified By: Poloff Phaedra Gwyn for reasons 1.4 b&d

CORRECTED COPY (renumbered paragraphs)

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: On February 27 children in the New Forces (NF) controlled zone finally started taking the exams that will allow them to progress to the next level of their education. Since February 2004 the pro-Gbagbo Minister of Education had been refusing to allow the exams to be held until the rebel New Forces (FN) disarmed, citing security concerns and an insufficient number of teachers to give the exams. However, under new Prime Minister Banny the issue became less politicized and the Minister of Education stepped out of the way. This is a victory for Banny and for the FN, but ultimately it is a victory for the whole country, an important step forward toward reconciliation and reunification. END SUMMARY

12. (SBU) On February 27, children in the rebel-controlled north and west of Cote d'Ivoire zone began taking the exams that allow them to progress to the next level of their education. Exams had last been given in February 2004 for the 2002-2003 school year.

13. (SBU) This issue dates back to the 2002 failed coup attempt that resulted in the rebel New Forces (NF) gaining control of the northern sixty percent of Cote d'Ivoire's territory. Unable to retake the territory militarily, President Gbagbo sought to exert pressure on the NF by announcing that civil servants who remained would be considered "rebel sympathizers." Doctors, nurses, judges, and other government workers left the rebel zone by the thousands. Roughly half of the teachers in the north returned south and were placed in other schools or continued to collect their salaries without working. About 6000 teachers stayed in the rebel zone as volunteers, managing as best they could or being paid as little as ten dollars a month from villagers or from relatives in the south. Some of the teachers who remained did so out of sympathy with the cause of the rebels. Others had no ties to the south and preferred to remain where they came from.

14. (U) In the Ivoirian system, children must pass exams at three points in their education in order to graduate from secondary school. The first is after seven years of primary school, in order to advance up to secondary school. Secondary school also lasts seven years but is divided into two cycles. Students must pass a second exam in order to advance up from the first cycle to the second cycle. Finally, at the end of the second cycle, they must pass a third exam, the "Bac," in order to graduate. These exams are normally held at the end of the school year in June-July.

15. (SBU) All through 2003, Education Minister Amani N'Guessan Michel, from President Gbagbo's Ivoirian Popular Front (FPI)

party, refused to allow any of these exams to be held in the north, preventing any children from moving up through the system. In February 2004, under tremendous pressure from the international community, especially UNICEF and UNESCO, he finally allowed exams to be held for the 2002-2003 school year. However, despite continued international pressure, until now he refused to allow the exams for 2003-2004 or 2004-2005 to be held. Amani cited security concerns and an insufficient number of teachers to administer the exams, and he insisted that the exams could not be held as long as the rebels remained in control of the north.

¶16. (SBU) With the designation of Prime Minister Banny in October 2005, the issue of education in the north became less politicized. N'Guessan remained as Minister of Education, but Banny made the resumption of exams in the north one of his first tasks, and N'Guessan stopped standing in the way. Finally, between February 27 and March 14, exams were held in the rebel-controlled zone for the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school year.

¶17. (SBU) The process was not without problems. N'Guessan came up with a list of 171 teachers to travel north and administer the exams. Citing fears that there would be cheating, he did not want the same teachers who had been working with the students in the north to administer the exams to them. The civil servant teachers were offered about 160 USD to cover the costs of transportation, food, and lodging for the roughly two weeks of time they would spend in the north. In the end, however, few of the 171 teachers showed up to administer the exams for the over 90,000 students present. The UN Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (ONUCI), UNICEF, UNESCO, and the European Union all stepped in to help the Education Ministry administer the exams and to assure

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their credibility.

¶18. (SBU) There was another controversy over the grading of the exams. Again fearing cheating, Minister N'Guessan wanted the exams to be brought back to Abidjan to be graded. The FN objected strongly and in the end, four grading centers were created in their zone, in Man, Korhogo, Bouake, and Odienne.

¶19. (SBU) Meanwhile back in Abidjan, when it was announced that the exams would be held, pro-FPI elements protested loudly that exams should not be allowed until the FN disarmed. Pro-FPI newspapers ran stories, none of them substantiated, about teachers being harassed and even killed in the NF zone. The pro-FPI Student Federation of Cote d'Ivoire (FESCI) threatened to block the return of any more teachers to the rebel zone, then they changed tactics and forced scattered strikes in Abidjan schools. However, once the exams were held, the furor died down.

¶10. (C) COMMENT: This was another big success for Banny, once again delivering on an issue important to people's daily lives. It was also a victory for the FN, because N'Guessan relented on his insistence that they disarm before the exams could be held, and in the end the exams were administered peacefully. Ultimately, it was a victory for the whole country, an important step forward toward reconciliation and reunification. END COMMENT.  
Hooks